

THE
PRINCIPLES and PRACTICES
OF THE
METHODISTS

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Farther considered;

IN A

K Academicus

LETTER

TO THE

Reverend Mr. *George Whitefield*.

Docent antequam discunt. HIER.

I fear they who stop the workings of reason, lie the more open to the workings of their imagination.

WESLEY'S Preservative, p. 117.

CAMBRIDGE,

Printed by J. BENTHAM, Printer to the UNIVERSITY;
for Messrs T. & J. MERRILL Bookfellers in Cambridge;
and sold by Mr. DOD in Ave-Mary Lane, Mr. MILLAR
in the Strand, and Mr. DODSLEY in Pall-Mall, London.

M.DCC.LXI.

Mr. Birch. Journal. Author's
16 May 1761.

ERRATA:

- P. 31. l. 9. *not should be left out.*
P. 35. l. 24. *been must be added after lame.*
—— l. 26. *for have read had.*
P. 40. l. 1. *for calfs read class.*
P. 54. l. 19. *for as read or.*
P. 37. l. 5. *after judgment put a point of Interrogation.*
—— Note l. 1. *Barnard read Bernard.*
P. 45. l. 23. *after mind put a point of Interrogation.*



(2)
Rev^d. Sir,

IT is a matter seriously to be lamented, and is indeed the subject of common complaint among the several parties of Christians, that notwithstanding the great reverence for truth which we all profess, and the real concern we all of us have to be rightly informed in the truths of religion, so many of us should unhappily miscarry in the main end of our enquiries ; that instead of that clear and useful knowledge, which we want and are in pursuit of, the greater part of us should still deviate into error or wander in uncertainty ; instead of being enabled to pay such a religious service, as may become intelligent and reasonable beings, we should either be overcast with the gloom and horrors of superstition, or fall into all the freaks and wildness of enthusiasm.

Manifold are the causes, which have contributed to bring men into this unhappy situation ; and I would not alarm the reader so far, as to attempt a particular enumeration of them. The different capacities which God has given us, and the different degrees of improvement we must receive from the various

conditions in which we are placed, will give us larger or narrower views of intellectual objects, and therefore represent them in various lights. The early impressions of education, and the particular modes of expression, used by that society of men with whom we may happen to be connected, will present things to us under very different appearances. Views of interest or power have often distorted the judgment of men, and engaged them in unrighteous attempts to pervert the judgment of others. The affectation of singularity or an ambition to gain the credit of superior discernment have led many to question the truth of received opinions, and to take up others without proper enquiry. The common way of conducting controversies, with the various arts of refinement and subtlety that human wit has invented, has had it's full share in propagating errors; for by this kind of collision much fire has often been struck out, though but little light. And as fruitful a source of mistakes, as any other, has been I fear the presumptuous conceit of some immediate intercourse with the Deity, and the groundless persuasion of knowledge communicated in a supernatural way by Him. But to whatever causes this evil may be owing, the abuse of language has been the common engine made use

use of to produce or spread it; that which Providence graciously intended as the general means of conveying information, has been misapplied or wickedly perverted into an instrument of deception.

This has sometimes indeed happened by mistake, but oftener through design. Some have been deceived themselves, but more have meant to deceive others by the abuse of words. The communication of our thoughts to each other, in the commerce and business of common life, is usually kept up with exactness enough to answer it's purpose. Where the objects are before us, which our words are by agreement to represent, there is little room for error or imposition. But in religious or moral matters their meaning is not so easy to be ascertained: as they are made up of a larger combination of ideas, and we cannot often refer to that standard, by which their sense is invariably to be adjusted. Many of these are united under one term, were combined at pleasure, and are continued by consent; this term will often be found to contain more or less, as used by different writers; and sometimes to be varied through inadvertency or ill design by the same writer.

But all this, you will probably say, is only the specious language of vain philosophy, or

of vague and general declamation. What I mean therefore may as well be explained by instances; and plenty of these are at hand. There are half a dozen words, which are in common use among ourselves, or frequently occur in your admirable writings, the meaning of which it will be well if we can settle in half a dozen sheets of paper. I will only single out for our present consideration, Faith, Reason, Regeneration, Experiences, Enthusiasm, Assurance: These with some few incidental matters, which may arise out of them, and have a relation to them, will furnish out, if I mistake not, ample materials for this letter.

The standard, to which I would refer, and by which I would regulate the meaning of these, and of all other words, that make a part of Christianity, is the written Word of God. I am a Protestant, and can receive no other supplemental rule of my faith. If you have any other, we shall be the less likely to agree at our first setting out. But yet I am not disposed to reject your account, if it be supported by any proper and reasonable proof; if you can produce any such evidence in it's behalf, by which you would have one penny of your property determined, or on which the perception of any other truth in the world depends.

The

The will of God, when conveyed to us by the use and intervention of language, must inevitably be subject to such obscurity of meaning, as is incident to all languages; particularly those, which are become dead or disused in conversation. But yet in that dress it lies open to every one's view and examination. It's darkness may usually be cleared up, and it's doubtfulness ascertained by the use of proper means. The more attention we pay to these, the more successful we shall probably be in penetrating it's obscurity, and in settling it's ambiguities. Under all it's disadvantages, we may that way attain to more certainty, I apprehend, in the search of religious truth, than by viewing it through the deceitful medium of oral tradition, or having it explained by the dubious comments of private inspiration.

§ 2. I find scattered here and there through your writings some hints of your dislike to the study, and low opinion about the attainments of human literature*. This sort of lan-

* "The course of my studies I soon entirely changed, where-as before I was busied in studying the dry sciences and books that went no farther than the surface, I now resolved to read only such, as entered into the heart of religion. See *full account of God's dealings with the Rev. G. Whitefield,*" &c. p. 18.

"My mind being now more open,—I began to read the holy Scriptures, laying aside all other books." *ib.* p. 31.

n v guage neither surprises nor concerns us, when it comes from those, who can neither judge of it's excellency or understand it's use. It's inexpediency in any of our religious enquiries was zealously urged formerly by the *Thuringian* Boors, and since those times by some illiterate fanatics among ourselves. It is indeed no wonder, that those should pretend to attain useful knowledge by a nearer and extraordinary way, who may despair of attaining it in the common and ordinary one. But this topick I think would have suited you better, when you were in a sphere of life, which removed you from all kind of literary pursuits, than after you had received the advantages of a learned education: It would more become you * "in your blue apron and snuffers," than after you had put on the more scholarlike and respectable garb, which you now wear.

Learning, Sir, like every other valuable gift of Providence, may be abused to bad purposes, or directed to fruitless ones. I mean not here to defend it's wrong or mistaken application, and surely there can be no occasion in these enlightened times to vindicate it's

* See Mr. *Whitefield's* account of himself in this situation at the Bell-Inn in *Gloucester*, in the two first parts of his *Life*, with his *Journals*, revised by himself, 1756. p. 4.

use. He indeed, who in this improved and knowing age should venture to erect the standard of ignorance, would doubtless find some ready to lift under this auspicious banner; he, who should now recal with pleasure or commendation the happy days of barbarism, would meet with some disposed to join in such an ill-timed eulogy; but * should one of these demagogues succeed so far as to draw a number of disciples after him, I would have him proceed a step farther, and aim next at introducing that useful piece of Turkish superstition, "to reverence men as saints, only because they happen to be simple."

As the pursuit indeed of all useful knowledge is laborious, and it's progress slow, the difficulty of attaining it in the common way will naturally give rise to † Empiricks of all

* "Let me caution you against the plague of disputing, which would bring leanness into your souls; and against reading many books, which would make you neglect your Bible." *Pref. to divine Songs*, p. 21. by Mr. Berridge.

"I know this is foolishness to the letter-learned men." 3 *Jour.* p. 80.

"Those who are truly awakened—throw away their useless books, as those did the books of divination and curious arts, whose conversion we read of, Acts V." 1 *Jour.* p. 47.

† "What a slur does this cast on all human learning, when a little Log-house has produced more godly ministers within these ten years, than both the Universities of Oxon and Cambridge: excepting those of our brother Whitefield and Wesley's Society." *Mr. Seward's Jour.* p. 12.

kinds;

kinds ; who will affect to decry the received methods of instruction, and seek to come at it by more compendious means. The humour of favouring these bold pretenders will more or less take place in every age, but will be found perhaps to prevail most in a sceptical and inquisitive one. For as all knowledge will plainly appear to be defective in many points, and will be suspected by those of a doubting turn to fail in many more, recourse will in that case be had to men of a more enterprizing genius, who * less sensible of their own defects, and of course more confident in their pretensions, will by the high tone of authority and assurance with which they speak, be more likely to impose upon the credulous and unwary. The remedies, in which quackery of all sorts is apt to deal, however imperfectly their other qualities may be known, are commonly such as are quick and active in their operations ; so that when used in spiritual or corporeal maladies, though they may sometimes produce sudden and wonderful effects, yet they will ever be liable to do much mischief by the violence of their nature, as

* " Imperitia confidentiam, eruditio timorem creat."
D. HIER. Ep. ad Evag.

" Recta ingenia debilitat verecundia, perversa confirmat audacia." PLIN. Ep. l. 4. E. 7.

well as the undistinguishing manner of their application.

If religious knowledge be the object of enquiry, * men of more vanity than judgment, who are hurried on by a strong imagination without a proportionable ballast of understanding; will attempt to find out a nearer way, than common mortals have, of attaining these important truths; they may think of coming at what they want without the help of those natural means, which others are obliged to use; by opening, as they may presume, an immediate intercourse with Heaven. This way indeed will at once gratify their ease, and flatter their vanity; it will save them the trouble of a painful research, and intitle them besides to the reverence of others by this supposed distinction and sanctity of their character.

Nor is it to be wondered at, that those who by a peculiar temperament of body are subject to the warm impressions of fancy; or have been soothed into a high opinion of themselves by the pleasing illusions of conceit; or have worked themselves up to a high

* "I confess (says Mr. Seward) I understand but little of Greek or Latin, though I was seven years at the Grammar-School, my talent lying another way.—But I trust I have been taught of God, what all will allow to be the best teaching." *Pref. to his Journal.*

pitch of rapture by violent and flighty exercises of devotion, should entertain a strong persuasion, that they are admitted to a nearer communion with the Deity ; and that those agreeable sensations of delight, which they feel within themselves, should be looked upon as undoubted indications of his esteem, and symbols of his presence. While they are thus raised in their own apprehension above the common level of mortals, and elated by the sense of their own pre-eminence, they will naturally expect some testimony of his regard, suitable to the degree of favour, in which they are presumed to stand. In this frame and temper of mind they may mistake the fervours of imagination, or the suggestions of self-flattery for divine impressions or communications from Heaven.

With what care and circumspection then should we guard every avenue to the Soul, which is thus beset by the most dangerous snares, and liable to be approached by the most fatal delusions ? which when misled by the wandring and unsteady light of Enthusiasm, disdains to obey the plainest dictates of reason, or * submit to the clearest determinations

* When Mr. *Whitefield* refused to comply with the injunctions of the proper officer, who required him to perform the usual exercises of his college ; and when a friend came to

tions of religion : and which, when it abandons these trusty guides, may embrace the wildest conceit, that the vast range of fancy can present to it, as an immediate impulse from the divine Spirit. How rapid too and vehement must be the efforts of this passion, when all a man's powers are called forth, all his zeal and vigour excited, all his designs and resolutions animated by the fullest conviction, that he is acting under the express direction of Heaven, and led to execute, what he undertakes, by the immediate finger of God ?

§ 3. It is with concern then, that I observe some degrading expressions, which you and your * associates occasionally throw out about human reason, as well as learning : you do not indeed attack it in form ; you do not object, as some have done, to the doubtfulness with which it is attended, and the obscurity in which it is involved ; or infer from these defects how incapable it must be of assisting us in the most important concern of life, in

to him and urged the command of Scripture, “ to be subject to the higher Powers ;—I answered, yes ; says he, but I had a new revelation ;”—In this extraordinary way, it seems, he received a divine dispensation to relieve him from the hardship of making a theme. *God's dealings with Mr. G. Whitefield.* p. 25.

* “ Never reason with Satan (says Mr. Berridge) but trust in the Lord with all your heart.” *Pref. to divine Songs,* p. 23.

forming just sentiments about religion and happiness : but you shew the mean opinion you have of it's use and value, by dropping intimations in that peculiar strain of humour, and odd kind of phraseology in which you deal; by calling such of your Brethren, as you judge to be advocates for it, " Letter-learned Divines, Polite Reasoners, Modern Rabbi's, Men of Head-knowledge, &c." It is easy to be seen, what purpose this is meant to answer; but let us also consider, on what grounds this kind of language can be supported. It is plainly to open the way for the admission of divine impulses and impressions; but let us enquire whether these be indeed the most solid foundation, on which the belief and practice of a Christian can be built!

To magnify too much the powers of reason or too far to depreciate it's use, appear to me extremes equally improper in the pursuit, and hurtful to the attainment of truth. To assert it's ability for a full and perfect comprehension of every thing which belongs to natural and revealed religion; to make it an adequate judge of all God's various dispensations to men; of the reasons on which they proceeded, and the measures by which they were conducted, must lead us into scepticism, or terminate in unbelief. But then to suppose it

inca-

incapable of forming any judgment about those rules of life, which may be drawn from the frame of our nature or the constitution of society; of examining the proofs, on the validity of which revelation may be safely admitted, or of understanding that revelation, which was plainly given for the general use of all believers; these suppositions must needs lay us open to all the delusions and wildness of Enthusiasm.

Reason seems to me the faculty given us by God to direct our enquiries in all things, which nearly concern us; and the more nearly they concern us, with the more care and caution ought it to proceed. Some previous points are necessary to be settled, before a revelation can be received as divine; as whether it contains nothing contradictory to the best notions which we are able to form about the perfections of God, or to those moral principles, which relate to self-government and our social intercourse with men. The clear deductions of that reason, which God has given us, cannot I think be overturned by any subsequent revelation of his will, which he may be pleased to give. For we cannot suppose the Deity to contradict himself in the discoveries which he may vouchsafe to communicate to us, or that what he makes known in one way

way should be repugnant to what he makes known in another way.

In original revelation, miracles themselves must be submitted to some test, or subject to some conditions, before they can be urged as proper evidence of it's divine authority; they afford not, I conceive, sufficient proof to establish doctrines unworthy to come from God, or plainly hurtful to the general good and happiness of man. In traditional revelation, human testimony is not able to confirm or entitle to our belief matters of fact, which are impossible in themselves, or utterly incredible in their nature or end. But, set aside all the use and benefit of men's understanding, take away the discriminating powers of reason, by which they are enabled to discern the difference of things, and judge about the nature of what is proposed to them, and every sort of revelation will stand as far as I can see (though it cannot stand long) on the same sandy foundation; all pretensions of this kind must be admitted, or none.

The just conclusions of reason, when employed in observing the constitution of nature, and our own situation in that system of rational beings with which we are connected, make up the substance of natural religion. When she proceeds to contemplate what is revealed,

revealed, her way of judging is not changed nor her powers suspended, though the extent of her prospect be much enlarged. She must be still satisfied as to the quality of the doctrines which it proposes, and the validity of the arguments on which it rests, before she can assent to it's divine character and original. Even that part of it, relating to God's nature or providential administration, which may greatly exceed the utmost reach of our capacity, yet must not be contradictory to the clear notices or deductions of our reason. It must appear credible, before any one can receive it as true; credible indeed not from the nature of the truths themselves as clearly explained, or perfectly understood; but as found to be no way repugnant to our most improved apprehension of things, and as depending on a testimony, which we acknowledge to be infallible.

It is doubtless a valuable part of knowledge to see the boundaries by which it is circumscribed, as it is a part of prudence to contain ourselves within those boundaries. To aim at pushing our discoveries farther on the intellectual globe, than our faculties will admit, or the author of them intended, is a dangerous project, and must end in disappointment. God's Nature, Perfections, and Providence;

dence; are subjects much too large for our comprehension, and to understand them in their whole extent must plainly surpass all the powers of the human mind. But then to suppose, that every thing else relating to Religion, the expediency of the rules which it prescribes, and the strength of the proofs on which it is founded, are equally insuperable by any efforts of the understanding, is a conceit as hurtful to the credit of religion as it is injurious to our own rational character.

This matter has been lately well considered and explained with great force and clearness by an able reasoner; "When men are persuaded (says he*) that the understanding is not a capable judge of religion, if they cannot be induced to lay religion quite aside, they will of course substitute something else as a more capable judge;—and then any thing whatever in principle or practice will indifferently usurp that sacred character. As to natural religion, they are left to the delusion of fancy, the force of complexion, prejudices which have been early imbibed, or superstitions which are publicly received. As to revealed religion, they have no security against false pretensions to revelation, or false interpreta-

* " See *Academica*, part 1. containing several Discourses on the Certainty, Distinction, and Connexion of natural and revealed Religion." By *James Tunstall, D. D.*

tions of a true one; precarious claims of infallibility in others, or groundless presumptions of infallibility in themselves. In short, anything which suddenly strikes the fancy, whether imagined by ourselves or suggested by others, will be taken for a ray of divine truth; and every accidental emotion of the mind, or uncommon appearance of nature, for the immediate effect of divine operation. Whereas would reason re-assert her native sovereignty, she might both establish us in the truth, by shewing upon what satisfactory evidence all religion is to be received; and effectually secure us from error, by shewing how all false religions may certainly be tried."

§ 4. All men would be thought impartial enquirers after truth; but the point is how we may distinguish the true from the pretended votary. I know of no criterion more certain and indubitable, than that he should always be disposed to proportion the degree of assent, which he gives to any matter, to the strength and clearness of the evidence, by which it is supported. If he be willing to give it farther credit, than any reasons which he can alledge, or any proofs, which he can produce, will justify; he may be influenced by conceit, he may give way to some ruling passion, he may be led by inclination or interest,

terest ; but he is not governed by a due affection for truth*.

As some therefore may be wrought upon by a warm imagination to presume, or led by interested views to pretend, that they have been favoured by an extraordinary communication of heavenly knowledge, the reality of these communications and the nature of that which is advanced on their authority, must be carefully examined, before they can be allowed to be worthy of credit. Every kind of revelation must stand the test of this enquiry. In whatever manner any sort of religious instruction is afforded to the understanding, reason must judge both of the validity of the evidence, which it carries with it, and of the meaning which it is intended to convey. Even that private intercourse with the Deity, which you and your followers so frequently lay claim to, should be subject I apprehend to some kind of proof, before it can be safely admitted by yourselves, or reasonably admitted by others without danger of delusion. " What I see, I know to be so by the evidence of the thing itself ; what I believe, I take to be so upon the testimony of another ; but this testi-

* See the Chapter on Enthusiasm, in the fourth Book of Mr. *Locke's* Essay ; where this subject is treated of in that clear and full and masterly manner, which so much distinguishes the writings of that acute and discerning man.

mony I must know to be given, or else what ground have I for believing? I must see that it is God, who reveals this to me, or else I see nothing. The question then here is, how do I know that God is the revealer of this to me; that this impression is made upon my mind by his holy Spirit, and that therefore I ought to obey it? If I know not this, how great soever the assurance is that I am possessed with, it is groundless; whatever light I pretend to, it is but Enthusiasm”*.

But let us duly attend, it is suggested, to what passes in our own minds, and we may have at once all the information and evidence we can want. We see the light, and we feel the conviction; light not acquired in the usual way, but infused from above; conviction not effected by slow and gradual enquiry, but produced by immediate inspiration. We see the brightness of the one, we feel the strength of the other; one strikes us with a lustre, which is not to be questioned; the other operates with a force, which is not to be resisted. So you and your other leaders say; but the misfortune is, that Enthusiasts of every age and country have said the same. I doubt not but many of them were as fully convinced and as much in earnest as yourselves; and I want to

* See the Author abovementioned. B. 4. c. 19.

know, whether they had not as much reason to be so. I have seen some, I have heard of many more mischievous effects of religious delusion; and as I would willingly have some security for myself, so I would endeavour to furnish others as far as I could, with some proper guard against it.

You have received (as you tell us) some extraordinary manifestations of God's favour and discoveries of his will, and you require us to believe them; give us then some reasonable and satisfactory proof, on which our belief may properly be grounded; otherwise you are much too arbitrary and assuming in what you require. But when we want in so serious an affair a proportionable degree of evidence, put us not off with flights, raptures, and asseverations! If in such an important and weighty article any one's bare word is to be taken*, he who asserts his pretensions with the most confidence, will have the best chance to gain belief, and the person truly inspired

* I know of none, who has used stronger language on such an occasion, than *John Mason*, the Vicar of *Water-Stratford, Bucks*; who declared to a large assembly of his followers, that Christ had personally appeared to him in his bed-chamber, *April 16, 1694*, and who confirmed his relation by the following words, "By the living God, it is true; by the eternal God I saw him with these Eyes, &c." — See an impartial account of this remarkable Enthusiast, by *H. Maurice*, Rector of *Tyringham, Bucks.* 1695. 4to.

will stand on no better footing of credit than the impostor. How unstable and precarious then must be the foundation of all those divine impulses and impressions, which make such a triumphant appearance in your Journals, and with which you figure so mightily in your harangues to the people! How weakly are such of your pretensions supported, though set off with so much pomp of expression! like some aqueous plants I have seen, which spread a broad and stately leaf on the surface of the water, while the fibre, by which they hang and on which they depend for their support, is slenderer than a thread.

But truth may be conveyed to the mind by the immediate inspiration of God;—doubtless it may, and we readily should and safely may give it admission, when it is so conveyed. But then we must certainly know, that it comes from Him, who cannot lye. Our own persuasion, how strong and steadfast soever, cannot be that kind and degree of conviction, on which we can securely depend. Zealots, the most blind and intractable zealots have acted and suffered under the settled influence of this persuasion. Opposite opinions have been maintained and persisted in by different parties, under the same confident assurance of divine illumination. This assurance may be
owing

owing to the suggestions of self-flattery, or to an uncommon warmth of fancy; it may take its rise from vanity or an affectation of being distinguished for singular endowments; it may be infused, as far as we know, by the subtlety and illusion of some lying spirit. If the truth of these pretensions then be not examined by some test, extrinsic to the persuasions themselves, what a door does such a claim open to endless delusions of the most dangerous kind? And yet how nearly does it concern us to make no mistake in admitting the pretensions of others, or indulging persuasions of our own, as it is a matter of so much consequence to our credit and to our happiness?

A persuasion of this nature will be as likely to be continued with obstinacy, as it was taken up with rashness. Pride and perverseness of temper will make men resolutely adhere to that which they have once stedfastly believed and strenuously defended. One of this sanguine complexion will also be fond of making proselytes and propagating his own notions; in which matter he will deal with the understanding of others, as he has done with his own; he will expect to convince without using the proper means of conviction, and think of persuading them without the help

help of argument, as he has already persuaded himself without it. — Ought they to be esteemed then as true friends or proper advocates for inspiration, whose principles if allowed and whose pretences if admitted would overturn the credit and destroy the certainty of all inspiration?

§ 5. When God is pleased to make any extraordinary manifestation of his will, he does not I presume supersede the use of our natural faculties, or take away the ordinary assistance of that understanding, with which he had before endowed us. By this alone indeed we are qualified to discern the nature and meaning of any new lights or discoveries, which he may vouchsafe to communicate to us: nor ought we to receive them as lights communicated by Him without such a previous examination. Some tests may create a reasonable presumption, others may afford sufficient evidence, that the discoveries, which God is supposed to make, really come from him. If any one should suddenly be enabled to speak clearly in a language, in which he had never been instructed, and which was before utterly unknown to him, would not such a gift be a clear proof of some extraordinary assistance? should any one without the advantages of study or education deliver a col-

lection of moral duties, established on clearer grounds and better adapted to the principles of our nature, than any of the most inquisitive and improved Philosophers had been able to do, would not this afford a probable argument of some divine and supernatural instruction? Such extraordinary effects have then been produced by these communications from the Deity, as have plainly pointed out their author, and left no doubt about their divine original; and I question how far they will deserve credit, or demand our assent, when they are not attended by the evidence or supported by the sanction of some such peculiar and distinguishing marks.

The Prophets of old, when they were favoured with divine communications, had usually some outward signs afforded them or were endowed with some extraordinary gifts, by which they might be satisfied about the author of these divine communications. Whenever they were commissioned to deliver any thing "from the Lord," or as of divine authority to others, they were able to produce some particular attestations of the divine power and presence, to foretel future events or to effect some miraculous works, as the evidence of their extraordinary commission, and

and the credentials of that authority by which they spake.

The Apostles, when invested with the sacred character and employed in the important charge of publishing our Saviour's Doctrines to the World, were not only assisted by an infallible Spirit in the delivery of those doctrines; by whose help they had every thing necessary brought to their remembrance, and by whose superintendency they were guarded against any material error; but they were distinguished by an unquestionable power of producing, in the most open and publick manner, such "Signs and wonders and mighty deeds," as bore the clearest testimony to that extraordinary character which they assumed, and afforded the fullest proof of that divine and infallible authority, by which they were directed.

You have made pretensions to some powers of the same kind, as the vouchers or evidence of your new mission; but then you seem at the same time somewhat diffident of their validity, by expressing yourself on that subject in such cautious and doubtful language. You can assume occasionally a dignity and loftiness of stile, suitable to the importance of the commission which you assert, and to the authority of that high character, with which

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you

you seem to suppose yourself vested. But your pretensions do not appear to be steadily and uniformly supported; some of the doctrines, which you have delivered, and of the proceedings in which you have been engaged, as they stand recorded in your own writings, bear very questionable marks of such an awful character.

* “ There are some now living, you really believe, which shall not taste of death till they see the kingdom of God come with power;” and “ no one could do these things, you say, unless God were with him;” and you spoke as one having authority. These expressions, Sir, were used at a very important crisis, and refer to the visible display of those extraordinary powers, which were granted to open the way for that great event, the publication and reception of Christ’s religion. What you mean by them now, it may be difficult to apprehend, or how without the highest presumption you can judge them to be applicable, with any sort of propriety, to the present state of things;—If you use the same expressions on a very dissimilar occasion, or apply them to a common event, do not you

* *Four. 3. 51. Mark 9. 1. Four. 3. 33. John 3. 2. Four. 3. 108.*

make

make an improper and irreverent use of Scripture-language?

* You talk of "extraordinary assistance, "uncommon manifestations from above, "of your having received a double portion of God's Spirit, "which you felt as much as *Elisba* did, when *Elijah* dropt his mantle:" But with all this pompous and boastful language, can you produce such evident marks, as may satisfy others, of any extraordinary designation to your office, or the exercise of any extraordinary powers in the discharge of it? Can you shew, as the obvious meaning of your words leads us to suppose, that you have been favoured by any personal inspiration, or distinguished by any supernatural endowments, which are not promised and vouchsafed to other sincere Christians? We will readily admit your high claims to be well founded, if attested in such a manner, as may secure us, which we have a right to expect, from the danger of delusion. But if you affect to talk in so peculiar and elevated a strain, without pretending to have received any uncommon manifestations of God's presence or communications of his Spirit; but to share in such only, as are conferred on all the faithful fol-

* *Jour.* 2. 35. *Jour.* 3. 13, 15, 18.

lowers of Christ, this strange and particular way of speaking must offend considerate and sensible men, as it will serve to mislead the ignorant and unwary into very wrong notions ; notwithstanding this chicanery and ambiguous conduct, some will be willing to look upon you, as a well-meaning man but somewhat whimsical, though others may not be disposed to consider you in so favourable a light.

You have seen, I think, plainly enough the necessity of doing something extraordinary to give weight to your authority and gain credit to your pretensions. You venture therefore, now and then, to recite atchievements of an obscure and ambiguous nature, which may serve to impress on the minds of the vulgar some notion of your supernatural endowments, or appear to them distinguishing marks of divine favour ; but which, if they should be too nicely scrutinized and enquired into, you plainly reserve to yourself the power of explaining away into the common gifts or ordinary dispensations of Providence.

One may perceive manifest tokens of your perplexity on this head, in that curious repository of religious anecdotes, called your *Journals*. I have often seen and pitied the distress you have been in between strength of
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inclination and want of ability; when you have recited several things, which bordered on the marvellous, and which notwithstanding you did not care to vouch for miraculous. I have read over the accounts you give, relative to this subject, with what attention I can; I am not sensible of any unwillingness on my part to be convinced by proper and satisfactory evidence; and yet your accounts taken together do not appear to me to carry with them so clear an attestation, as I could wish to have, of any extraordinary powers, with which you have been invested.

You seem indeed to have expressed yourself on some occasions in such a manner, that common readers will be likely to mistake your meaning and to misapprehend the nature of your pretensions, though an opening is plainly left to explain your words in such a way, as may not be liable to exception. Your writings will furnish us with many instances of this equivocal kind, and particularly on the subject now before us.

You “ have made great inroads, as you often tell us, into *Satan's* kingdom, and have by the efficacy of your prayers, as the language, which you and your brethren use, would lead us to understand, driven evil Spirits from the bodies of men, which had been thrown into
dreadful

dreadful agonies and torments through their influence and by their operation. As to the success you have had in reducing *Satan's* invisible empire over men, I hope it has been as great as your own sanguine complexion may dispose you to think; but it seems a point, which can hardly be seen with clearness or pronounced upon with certainty. With regard to dæmoniacal possessions, are not these understood to have been chiefly confined to that period of time, when the greatness of the occasion called for such extraordinary powers to remove them? Though the Romanists boast of these exorcisms, as a standing power which still subsists in their church, do we not and ought we not to use great caution in giving credit to relations of this kind? Their ritual indeed lays down several marks, as unquestionable proofs of their reality; but yet those of that communion are not agreed in admitting the certainty of those proofs. The Civilians, whose judgment has been called in to assist in some nicer cases, have determined, that to speak all languages for instance was not a necessary test, but only *proprium in quarto modo*. Some of their own writers have ventured to use a little pleasantry in the relation of these transactions. The Nuns of *Loudun* fell under some suspicion of imposture from their ignorance

rance in the construction of language, and offences against the plainest rules of Syntax. When *Barre* the exorcist said to the Mother Superiour, "*Quem adoras,*" and she answered "*Jesus Christus;*" *Drouin* his assessor hastily cried out, "*Voila' un Diable qui n'est par congru.*"

I would not here be understood to deny, that there may not be now persons really possessed by evil spirits; much less to doubt, that there have been such; but these cases must be attended with clearer evidence, than any which you have produced, before I can believe them myself, or would recommend them to the belief of others. Our religion rests on that firm and unshaken foundation, which was laid by the public and acknowledged miracles of Christ and his Apostles; it wants not any additional support from new ones; nor can I think that the most proper method of advancing the cause of protestantism, which has been so known and powerful, an engine in the hands of popery.

You lay the greatest stress on the wonderful efficacy of your preaching; particularly in the fields, the public theatre on which your talents have been chiefly displayed. "You have most power, you tell us, when you speak in the open air:" though this does not afford

a sufficient proof to me, that "God is pleased with this way of preaching;" nor ought it I think to afford one, as you tell us it does, to you, as you and your brethren testify, that this * practice was taken up from necessity, and when the clergy had been obliged by some ungrateful returns, you made them there, to refuse you the use of their pulpits. But surprising certainly are the accounts, you give us, of the † incredible number which you have sometimes drawn together, and the great quantity of halfpence which you have col-

* "Let not my adversaries say, I have thrust myself out of their synagogues; no they have thrust me out." 3 J. p. 88.

"Five churches have been already denied me." 2 J. p. 1.

"I approve of the excellent liturgy of our Church, would ministers lend me their churches to use it in." 4 J. p. 2.

"We are not suffered to preach in the churches, else we should prefer them to any place whatsoever." *W's farther Ap.* p. 117.

† "Preached at *Kennington*: I believe there were no less than fifty thousand people; and the word came with such power, that all I believe were pleasingly surprized." 3 J. p. 92.

"I was one of the collectors, — and we found we had collected forty-seven pounds, among which were sixteen pounds in halfpence." p. 94.

"Collected for the Orphan-house fifty-two pounds, twenty-two pounds of which was in Copper." *Dealings*, p. 74.

lected,

lected from your company ; of the high pitch to which your voice could be raised, and * the distance to which it would reach, when a proper occasion invited you to exert it. Your preaching has been attended on your own part (you tell us) with " much freedom and sweetness of spirit, often with great enlargements and carryings out of yourself, with frequent " supplies of supernatural strength and immediate " removals of your hoarseness. It has produced in others, " very good impressions, and " very great awakenings ; it has occasioned in some, " gracious, in others, " more solid meltings of the soul ; it " has pierced your hearers through and through, and " seemed to strike them like so many pointed arrows ; it has " melted down several young maidens, and what might perhaps be harder to effect, " the audience at *Newgate* ; it has " sent children away crying, and hushed to " silence ten thousand colliers at *Kingswood*." You talk also of some great work which is now carried on, and that God " is going to do great things among us ; you boast of many tokens of his especial presence among you, and of some " uncommon manifestations granted to yourself from above :"

* Some were pleased to honour me so far as to trail a dead fox, and hunt it round the hall (at *Cardiff*) ; but my voice prevailed. 3 J. p. 50. ib. 33, 36, 57.

these lofty claims and this pompous language may, as it is doubtless intended to do, attract the attention and raise the wonder and engage the reverence of the multitude; we also shall be ready to admire, as soon as we see sufficient reason; as soon as we clearly understand the nature and extent of those claims, about which your manner of speaking leaves us in doubt. For we must not be carried away by a swell of expression, which may sink and leave us perhaps in a low ebb of meaning; we must not be tossed to and fro by every "wind of doctrine, which may only pretend to be, when they are not in reality, "breathings from the spirit." Without such proper evidence, all the exalted things you have said, and all the wonderful things you have done, will pass I fear with many only for the frenzy and rant of fanaticism: They will be apt to think your journeyings the effects of a roving and itinerant temper, and ascribe them to a strong tincture of that heroical passion, by which so many Saints of the Romish communion have been actuated. But in whatever light they may be seen, this new mission of your's cannot certainly be thought by any cool and considerate man to carry with it "that demonstration of spirit and of power, which attended the first propagation of Christianity,

how much soever you may venture to assume the authority, or to affect the language of it's preachers.

You are often appealing, sometimes in a more explicit and sometimes in an indirect manner, to the many conversions, lately brought about by your preaching, as furnishing full proof of the particular and extraordinary assistance, that has been vouchsafed to you. The occasion of your introducing and your manner of reciting these wonderful events, shew that you meant to distinguish them from any effects of this sort, produced by the most eminent and industrious of your Ecclesiastical brethren; and that you would have them considered as similar or corresponding to that extraordinary progress, which the Apostles made, and to those supernatural works which they openly displayed in the first propagation of our religion. "Has not God (say you) in an extraordinary manner set his seal to our ministry? Have not many, that were spiritually blind, received their sight, many that were lame, strengthened to run the way of God's commandments? Have not the deaf heard, the lepers been cleansed, the dead raised, and the poor have the Gospel preached to them? that these *notable miracles* have been wrought, not in our names or by our own

power, but in the name and by the power of *Jesus of Nazareth*, cannot be denied *".

Seriously, Sir, this manner of comparing what you have done with what Christ and the Apostles did, and your affectation of using their words, but not in their meaning, afford a more signal and striking proof of your own presumption, than I could wish to have found; but do not exhibit so clear an attestation of any extraordinary power, as every thinking man will expect. Mr. *Woolston* was for supporting the truth of our religion by the same kind of miracles; real and well-attested facts he explained away into figure and allegory. The malicious design of such a comment was plain enough to be understood, and was seen by every reader. You indeed produce no such facts, as are the objects of sense and lye open to our notice; but you substitute in their room some effects, which you expressly call *miraculous*; but which are of too hidden and concealed a nature to be clearly examined. What claims you meant to found on these *notable miracles*, you best know; but the meaning of your expressions, if we judge most favourably of them, must be thought to be dubious and equivocal; and though we may

* 4 *Four*. P. 10, 11.

be ready to acquit you of any ill intention in the use of such expressions, yet who can commend the clearness of your sense, or the modesty of your temper, or the solidity of your judgment.

When the Fathers use this method of allegorizing the Scripture miracles, they do it not when they would urge them as strict proofs and in a proper way of reasoning; but when they mean to apply them to some moral use or enforce them in a rhetorical manner. When * one of them affirms, that Christ worked a greater miracle in the conversion of *Mary Magdalen*, than in the raising of *Lazarus* from the dead, no one understands this as a serious truth, but as a flight of oratory. The *Jesuits* cite various instances of wonderful works, produced in this way, by members of their society. † One of them appeals to it as a great miracle, that in an age so uncharitable and hard-hearted they can procure, whatever they desire, by the eloquence of their preaching. Other orders lay claim to the same surprising operations, as effected among themselves. “ The cord of a lay-brother (says

* *St. Bernard.*

† *Peter Deza*, in his sermon on the beatification of *Ignatius Loyola*, quoted by *Bayle*; see also *Scioppius's Infamia Fam. Stradae*. p. 159.

a * *Franciscan*) produces greater wonders than the rod of *Moses*. This indeed draws water from a rock, but that extracts bread, wine, flesh, and whatever he wants, from hearts harder than a rock."

§ 6. Some difficulty, it must be acknowledged, lies in the way of those, who will undertake to examine any of your opinions, as a sect or religious party; because they have not yet been collected into one code, as the standard of your principles and the settled rule of your faith. You have accordingly taken such an immoderate liberty, not only of differing from one another, but of varying occasionally from yourselves, that it is become no easy matter to single out those particular and discriminating tenets, which you will unite in the profession, or agree in the defence of.

If we, who use our understandings in the search and attainment of religious knowledge, should sometimes by having lesser or larger views of things see them in different lights, it is not so much to be wondered at. But it is not a matter so easy to be accounted for in you, that you do not agree with each other in your sentiments on these important subjects, or are not uniform in the delivery of

* See *Mercurie François* ad An. 1611.

your own ; if you are all really " taught of God," receive your information from the immediate dictates of the divine Spirit, and act under his extraordinary direction. It is too usual for ordinary and unenlightened men to contract an improper warmth from opposition, and to express an immoderate degree of zeal in support of their own opinions ; but it is rather surprising to see those of a more spiritualized disposition and of subdued passions * flame out into all that heat and vehemence of temper, or be betrayed into that unbecoming sharpness and asperity of language, by too large a share of which the polemical writings of common mortals have been so unhappily distinguished.

Here it will probably be said, that these are the common and venial frailties of our nature, from which it seems these holy men have not, nor is it to be expected they should have the privilege of an entire exemption. But they are certainly a pains-taking, and probably a well-meaning people. Their constant and laborious preaching, it may be pleaded, has produced very good effects, and made a visible amendment in the morals of those of the

* Accusing one another of " preaching a new gospel, of teaching doctrines, which are " damnable and essentially erroneous."

lower cast, who * “ are reduced within these twenty years (says one of their advocates) to a regularity and good behaviour, not to be parallel’d in the inhabitants of any nation on earth.” This representation I hope is strictly true, and that those poor people, who in that peculiar language you are pleased to deal in, were before “ only baptized heathens,” and as “ ignorant as the Papists themselves,” are now brought to have some proper notions of religion, a well-grounded faith, and a due sense of their Christian duty.

This effect is questionless a useful one to the public, by whatever means it was brought about. Messrs. *Fielding* and *Welch* have had, I apprehend, some share in effecting this happy change by the strictness of their police, and their attention to preserve good order. As to the ministers of parishes, whatever insinuations to their prejudice, or whatever suggestions about remissness in the discharge of their duty you may occasionally throw out, some of your brethren have been kind enough to acquit them of all blame in this affair †. One has invented a very candid and charitable argument to shew, that the present system of doctrines is so badly calculated to produce

* *Christian and Critical Remarks*, p. 5.

† See Mr. *Berridge's Letters*, p. 13.

any general reformation, that the preachers of them are thereby disabled "from bringing one soul to Christ." With another I have * the honour of agreeing in opinion: who has resolved this blessed change in the state of our religious affairs into the power of novelty†. "Had they (the ministers) preached like angels, it had profited them (their flock) nothing; they heard them not; but when one said, yonder is a man preaching on the top of the mountains, they ran in droves to hear him." No merit is expressly assumed to themselves by the authors of this new reformation; but what reason is there, that the chief agent in a design so generously undertaken and so successfully conducted should be, or from the nature of the thing how can he be concealed? He may indeed half withdraw himself from view with so modest and decent a reserve, as will only help to heighten his excellence, and set out his merit to advantage; but the limitation of time plainly enough points out the "humble instruments of this great work, and confines it's operation to that glorious æra, when our awakened teachers had been so long employed in the business of conversion, that the good seed,

* See *Principles and Practices of the Methodists*, p. 22.

† *Farther Appeal*, p. 119.

which they had so plentifully scattered in the fields, might be supposed to have had it's due increase, and to have arrived at it's proper maturity."

Here one can hardly help observing, what every one must have remarked, who has had the curiosity to look into that profound repository of your private reflections, as well as faithful register of your religious achievements, called your *Journals*; what a remarkable contrast they exhibit of varying and discordant sentiments on that important subject, Yourself; what alternate rises and falls are there to be found in your temper and affections; what a medley of seeming pride and affected lowliness, of immoderate conceit and excessive humility; even your faith, which one might expect to be placed on a more firm and steady bottom, is liable to the same kind of fluctuation; though it has nothing to do with the powers and faculties of your mind, it is I find unaccountably subject to the same disorders, by which your corporeal habit is affected. "When my spirits are gone, I find my faith less lively (you say) but I trust it is owing to the frame of my body *."

How often do you talk of supernatural strength, and exult with the Apostle, but with-

* 3 *Jour.* p. 23.

out shewing any appearance of his extraordinary gifts and endowments, “ * When I am weak, then am I strong !” One while by a discouraging inspection into the naughtiness and depravity of your own heart, “ † you see nothing in yourself, but “ a fitness to be damned ; but soon you hope to || overturn all the powers of darkness and make the kingdom of *Satan* totter ; sometimes in your own opinion || * “ you deserve to be the contempt and outcast of the people, and are convinced that we must be despised, e’er we can be vessels fit for God’s use ; but presently you cry out with rapture, “ it was never seen on this wise before ; and ‡ believe that few, if any, were able to resist the power with which God enabled you to speak ; now § “ it is a certain sign, that a more effectual door will be opened, since there are so many adversaries ; but immediately “ the numbers of your enemies are inconsiderable, but your friends cannot be numbered.” Now we find you depressed to the utmost depths of self-abasement, and sinking with the famous § * devotee to the

* 3 *Jour.* p. 3.

† *His Life, &c.* p. 2. || 3 *Jour.* p. 50. 61.

|| * 1 *Journ.* p. 31.

‡ 3 *Jour.* p. 108.

§ *ib.* p. 2. 71.

§ * The *Spanish Nun Maria de Jesus.*

centre of your own nothingness: when instantly we see you mounted on the wings of vanity, soaring to giddy heights of presumption, and exulting in pompous strains of a wild and extravagant self-importance.

But these, it may be said, are foibles and inadvertencies which may properly indeed excite a little merriment, but do not deserve too rigorous an animadversion; they may perhaps be fit subjects for some gentle raillery, but do not seem of consequence enough to give any alarm, or to raise any outcry. Why should the good actions of these men be evil spoken of? Why should their preachers be exclaimed against as ringleaders of a dangerous sect, or offenders against the good order of government, if they have made a visible reform and improvement in the manners of the common people? — To examine the truth and merits of this plea, it will be proper to enter upon a serious enquiry into the nature of those religious principles, which they advance, and the tendency of those general practices which they are known to inculcate or encourage among their followers.

§ 7. The leading principle in that scheme of religion, which these men teach, appears to me to undermine the whole fabrick of Christianity, by placing it on a foundation, which
cannot

cannot give it a real and sufficient support; by taking away that basis of just and rational proof, on which only it can rest; and making it depend on inward impulses and impressions, which may be entirely fantastical. Have not we then cause to be alarmed, when we see the foundation of our religion, like the foolish man's house, placed on sand, which every breath of private or pretended inspiration may undermine and overturn, instead of being fixed on that rock of evidence, whereon it has stood for ages? When a band of new Reformers has started up to propagate a religious system, not grounded on any proper proof, but depending altogether on certain feelings; the knowledge of which is not to be industriously acquired, but instantaneously infused; is not to be had by any use of our faculties, or application of our understanding, but is solely owing to some secret act of private illumination, which in a sudden and wonderful manner informs and irradiates the mind. From this account of the matter * *Alciphron* will be soon ready to infer, "that this faith sprouts forth from that common grain of Enthusiasm, which is an original ingredient in the composition of human nature."

* *Minute Philosopher*, vol. II. p. 6.

Our belief in the truth and divine authority of our religion is now, I apprehend, as it was at it's first propofal, an affent given to fufficient evidence, and effected by proper means of conviction; fuch means as do not indeed operate in a neceffary and irrefiftible manner, but yet are fitted to fatisfy a fair and ingenuous Enquirer; which may not be able to overcome preposfeffion, to filence cavil, or bear down obftinacy, but yet will afford proper grounds of perfuafion to the impartial and the candid. It is therefore a mixed act, wherein a due proportion of light and evidence are conveyed to the underftanding, but where the application of the will is alfo required to lay them properly before the mind; where fairnefs of difpofition and freedom from corrupt prejudices are wanted to make it have it's true effect, and exert it's full force.

When the Author of Chriftianity firft publifhed it to the world, he applied to men's intellectual powers, and founded it's divine original on a kind of proof, fhort indeed and compendious, but yet clear and perfuafive; futed to all capacities, and therefore beft adapted to the great purpofe of general conviction; but which would approve itfelf, upon a clofer furvey, to the judgment of the more inqui-

inquisitive. The supernatural acts of power, which he openly exerted, and to which he appealed as the authentic testimony of his mission, as they would operate with a quick and rapid force on the minds of the multitude, so would they afford proper Evidence and means of persuasion to more improved understandings. "No one can do such things, except God be with him," is an inference as obvious to be made on such an occasion, as it is made justly; it is a conclusion, which at the first glance would gain an easy admission into popular apprehensions, as it's validity, when it is drawn out in it's whole extent, and urged in it's full force, cannot be overthrown by the ablest reasoner.

Such as were conversant in the Jewish Scriptures, our Saviour refer'd to those prophetic notices, which held him out as their future lawgiver and deliverer to the hopes of that people, and which had raised among them so general an expectation of his appearance. To those he appealed, as pointing out with sufficient clearness and distinction the tribe and family from which he should arise, and the age and country in which he should appear; and affording explicit and discriminating marks of his peculiar office and character.

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The Apostles pursued the same method; they used argument and reasoning to convert men to the religion of their master: they bade them have recourse to those prophetic descriptions, which contained a circumstantial account of the office he came to discharge, and of the character he was to support. They refer'd to those miraculous works, which he had done and enabled them to do, as proper and convincing evidence of the authority, which they claimed; and they appealed to the great article of his resurrection, which was confirmed by the agreeing testimony of such different witnesses, as laying the firmest foundation for the hope and faith of all his followers; as making the most illustrious display of his power, and carrying with it the most incontestable marks of his divinity.

St. *Paul* seems on all occasions to have encouraged a Spirit of Enquiry in those, to whom he preached the doctrines and proposed the belief of the gospel. At * *Thessalonica* he went into the Synagogue three sabbath days, and reasoned with the Jews out of the Scriptures, opening the true sense of the ancient prophecies, and shewing from thence, that however views of interest and worldly attachments might prejudice them against

* Acts 17. 2 — 4.

such a notion, the Messiah was to suffer. He commended the * *Bereans* for searching the Scriptures, whether the things, which he had said, had a real foundation there; whether those prophetic marks and characters, which he had ascribed to the Messiah, were really accomplished in Christ. He proceeded also at † *Corinth* in the same manner of reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath, and using arguments, suited to their respective circumstances and apprehension of things, “to persuade the *Jews* and the *Greeks*.”

I do not find that the Author of our religion, or those who were commissioned by him to teach it to the world, ever required men to yield their assent, before they had afforded them the proper evidence on which it might be founded, or that they referred them to their inward feelings and impressions, as that proper evidence. I do not find, that they taught men to depend on unaccountable impulses made on the mind or fancy as sufficient means of conviction, or directed them to rely on a private revelation, which should be made in every one's bosom, (as the *Jews* were to have recourse to the divine oracle on the breast of *Aaron*) which should reveal to them the will of God, upon every occasion on which it

* *Acts* 18. 4, 6.

† *Acts* 18. 27.

might be consulted, by an effusion of extraordinary light.

Whatever indeed is proposed to be believed by us, must come enforced by some proof, or supported by some rational argument, which may recommend it as a proper object of belief. Whoever gives his assent to any matter without these inducements, assents at random, where he sees no evidence, and knows no reason. The more important any truth is, and the more nearly it concerns us, the more care we should take, the more caution we should use, that we neither receive nor reject it but on mature consideration, and on having used due industry in acquiring all the proper means of conviction.

This may appear to us perhaps with more clearness and force in the case of others, than in our own; though we should proceed on the same principles, and use the same proper means in directing and regulating our own belief, which we should in endeavouring to gain the belief of other men. Would we persuade any one to receive some weighty and useful truth, of which he was ignorant, or about which he doubted; the being of God, for instance, or the great principles of natural religion? Would we attempt to bring him over from Mohammedism or Judaism to the
Christian

Christian Faith? Should we ever think of undertaking this by any other method, than that which is suited to the state and nature of a rational being; by laying such arguments before him, as appear to us to be proper motives of persuasion, and to carry with them some strength and conviction?—To suppose otherwise is repugnant to all sober sense, contrary to the principles of our nature, and to our usual method of proceeding in affairs of much less moment and consequence.

If by the application of these suitable means such a one should be brought to embrace the Gospel, must we not also have recourse to the use of our reason, and to the guidance of our best judgment in the general interpretation of it's meaning? If the Scriptures should be found in any place to ascribe to God “eyes and ears and other members of the human body; if we should be there enjoined to “eat the flesh or to drink the blood of the Son of Man; if we are thereby commanded to “hate our father or our mother; “to pluck out a right eye or to cut off a right hand; must not these passages be understood in a sense consistent with our improved apprehensions of the Deity, and with his revealed will as to the true nature of the Christian sacrament? Must they not be explained in a manner agreeable

to those common affections which he has implanted in our bosoms, with the clear duties which result from our relation to each other, and with those primary laws of self-preservation, which make a necessary part of our nature ?

§ 8. It has indeed been advanced by some, that the exercise of our reasoning powers has nothing at all to do in the affair of religion ; neither in settling it's foundation, nor examining it's nature, nor ascertaining it's meaning : but least of all has it any concern with canvassing the evidence, on which it's truth is to be admitted, and it's principles embraced. Faith (say they) is to be infused, not acquired ; it is the action of some spiritual being, darting sudden light and irresistible conviction into the mind, not the effect of any sober or gradual enquiry, which the mind itself is fitted to make ; it is * “ a ray of light instantaneously darted in upon the soul, a † principle entirely planted in the soul by the mighty power of God,” without any concurrence, as must here be understood, of our own will, or co-operation of our own endeavours.

* Two first parts of *Mr. Whitefield's Life*, p. 11.

† *Seward's Jour.* p. 20.

Here we may observe a striking and remarkable similarity of sentiment, where one would least expect to find it, and among persons of a very different complexion. The zealous Christian and sly unbeliever preserve a wonderful harmony in the representation, which they both make of this matter. What cause can be assigned for so surprising an union on this subject in men of such discordant principles? What can be the secret bond, which holds together these opposite characters in such a close agreement of opinion? — I know but of one probable solution for so strange an appearance, *viz.* that the one sees farther than the other into the consequences of the position, which they both are eager and industrious to advance, that the understanding has no concern in matters of faith. By this pretended consent the insidious sceptick seduces the unwary believer to put himself under the direction of a wandering light, which he knows will mislead him; will draw him upon hollow and treacherous ground, which will disappoint his hopes and betray his footing; and in which when he is once entangled, he will find it equally difficult to retreat or to proceed with safety.

This

This injudicious conduct in some of it's advocates appears to me to have given great advantage to the opposers of our religion, as it must have administered matter of much triumph to it's pretended friends. It has perhaps hurt it's cause and credit little less, than the various arts of sophistry and misrepresentation, employ'd by it's adversaries. For when these join company with the others, and agree in taking the same rout, it is certainly done with a different view, and to arrive at a different point. While the well-meaning believer is warmed into rapture by some secret impressions, which in an unaccountable manner are made on his mind, looks upon them as divine impulses and acts of extraordinary illumination; resolves to follow their direction, how hard soever it may be to reconcile them with any maxims of human wisdom, as the express decisions of God's word; and calls it piety thus humbly to submit the powers of his understanding to the dictates of his faith: the artful Sceptick will treat this kind of persuasion with much seeming approbation, and encourage the serious Christian to persist in this method of defence, as most effectual to promote the end and vindicate the truth of his religion; but as he sees well enough, that this sort of conviction stands on no proof,

and

and is able to support itself by no argument; he certainly means that the reader shall be led by this gentle and insinuating manner to a conclusion, very different from that which he would appear to establish; shall hereby be taught to look upon it as the effect of blind credulity, and to reject the whole under the notion of Enthusiasm.

* *Bayle* has scattered through his writings frequent reflections on the feebleness of human reason, and it's insufficiency for any purposes of religious Enquiry. He is often hinting his advice not to trust divine matters to the doubtful issue of debate, and censures such a proceeding as inconsistent with true Christian Principles. He would have the disciple of Christ keep himself altogether within the secure fortress of holy writ, and hold up against all the attacks of argument the solid and impenetrable shield of faith.

Lord *Bolinfroke* talks on this subject in much the same strain, and with the same serious air. Sometimes indeed he uses only a little rhetorical flourish about "the impiety

* I refer the reader to the articles *Manicheans*, *Paulicians*, *Pomponatius*, &c. in Mr. *Bayle's* dictionary, and he will pass his own judgment on the reflections of this kind, which he will there meet with.

of reasoning, and the presumption of applying so inadequate a rule as that of human intelligence to the Councils of God." But in other places he more gravely argues, that they who in matters of religion "introduce reason, introduce it where it has nothing to do;" that it "cannot explain revelation, much less enforce it; that nothing less than another revelation can do either *." Nay, he now and then seems a proselyte to your opinions, advancing the doctrines, and using the very language of your Sect; though I think it may be made a matter of doubt, to which principle he was most likely to have trusted for his justification, his faith or his works. † "Natural law (says he) is founded in reason, which every creature that has it may exercise: — Christianity is founded in faith, and faith proceeds from grace; he, who has not faith, cannot fulfil a law, that consists at least as much in believing as in practising; and whether he shall have grace or no, does not depend on him." He is frequently glancing on this matter; such slight touches of argument, like grazing Balls, may be thought perhaps to do the most execution. It will require however no very acute or discerning Eye to

* *Phil. Works*, vol. IV. 258. 8vo.

† *Ib.* p. 24, 25.

see on what quarter his Lordship's mask'd battery, when it begins to be played off, is designed to bear.

But there is another writer*, who has laboured this point with so much dexterity and address, that he has made serious people doubt about the true complexion of his piece, and the real nature and tendency of his principles. He endeavours to shew by a variety of arguments, " that Religion can never be a thing to be taught, " that the intellectual faculty cannot be the principle intended by God to lead us to a true faith; that " there is a kind of Evidence of power beyond what reason can ever pretend to furnish; such as brings with it an assurance of mind to which all conviction by human means is an utter stranger; and that therefore " if we do but once heartily believe, it is a superfluous distinction to concern ourselves about, whether we know upon what grounds we believe or not." Some of these insidious positions, and the vein of grave drollery, which runs through this whole performance, give but little reason, I think, to hesitate about the genuine character of the author, and the true meaning of his arguments.

* *Christianity not founded on argument.*

† P. 7. 14.

It may seem a little strange to find you or any of your brethren in such dangerous company, avowedly excluding all religious matters from the province of reason, and speaking of faith, as an effect instantaneously produced, in a manner, as it should seem, which must over-rule, not co-operate with human endeavours *. "Reason not with Satan (one gravely advises his followers) but trust in the Lord with all your heart;" † another talks of "an immediate stroke of his (God's) convincing Spirit without any outward means at all." A third makes faith a principle || "entirely implanted in the Soul by the mighty power of God:" in which, if I rightly apprehend the meaning of the words, our understanding and will can have nothing to do. — The same cool and judicious divine prescribes to his hearers a very peculiar method of examining themselves, whether they are in the faith ‡; "they must put themselves on the trial by this text, That Jesus Christ must be in them; that is, as himself explains it, "they must be partakers of the self-same divine nature as he was." I can say little to these "participations of God's nature, or "cohabitations with his spirit, as

* Mr. *Berridge*, ib. p. 23.

† Mr. *Wesley's* Sermon. vol. I. p. 246.

|| *Seward's* Journal. p. 20.

‡ Ib. p. 78.

they are things so far removed from common apprehensions, and so much above my own. But I should think so great a part of Christian perfection, as you and your followers imagine, is not placed in attainments of so sublime and abstruse a nature, which plain men can neither understand nor arrive at.

God is said in * many places of the Old Testament " to be with man, when he affords him evident tokens of his protection and favour; and by his " dwelling or abiding with man is to be understood, according to the analogy of the same figurative expressions, the continuance of that protection, or the permanency of the blessings which are derived from it. A man is said by the Apostle † " to be or to dwell in Christ, if we may best collect his sense by comparing the several passages of his Epistles together, when he acts under a constant persuasion of his presence, and lives in an habitual obedience to his laws and submission to his authority. This sense is intelligible, this is a matter of general and indispensable obligation to all Christians, this is agreeable to the main design and end of the Gospel, and consistent with the whole tenour of Scripture-language.

* *Gen.* 26. 3, 24. *Ib.* 31. 3. *Exod.* 3. 12. *Josb.* 14. 12.

† 1 *John* 2. 5, 6. *Ib.* 3. 6, 24.

Some flighty Divines indeed affect to speak of plain obedience to the precepts of Christ, and a careful attention to every part of their Christian duty, as falling far short of those improvements, and of that perfection, which every believer should aspire to. They must soar to more lofty and spiritual Elevations of the Soul; they must make wonderful discoveries and proficiency in holiness by new interpretations of types and figures, they must aim at mystical unions with Christ, and inexplicable cohabitations with the Spirit; and these speculations, too nice for the human understanding to comprehend, but which give great scope to the wanton excursions of fancy, they make the test of our greatest advances in Christian knowledge, and highest attainments in Christian practice.

Some mystic and devotional writers have treated this subject in so peculiar a strain, as appears to me to border on prophaneness, and under a spiritual cover to make near approaches to the grossest sensualism *. But if they

* Large specimens of this strange language have been collected by *Rovenius*; such as *Transubstantiationes mysticæ*, *cordis concentrationes*, *absorpsio et liquefactio in amplexu Sponsi*; *allocutiones internæ*, *elevationes incognitæ*, *extensiones amatoricæ*; *extasis continua*, *justitium ratiocinii*, *influsus*, *inflammatio*, &c. *De Rep. Christian. l. i. c. 43.*

The Reader may see a great deal more of this extravagant and unintelligible rant, drawn from the writings of
the

they can be understood in any sober meaning, that meaning should not be too rigorously urged or too minutely explained, as it must depend on the dubious construction of a few figurative expressions. This refined doctrine, as men of different tempers and abilities have drawn it out into theories, and adopted it into their respective systems, has not I am satisfied any solid foundation in the express declarations of holy writ.

§ 9. These sceptical Philosophers will so far comply too with the prejudices of the believer, *ignari Scelerum tantorum Artisque Pelasgæ*, as to alledge the authority of Scripture in defence of their positions. But their manner of reasoning, like the face of *Janus*, looks two ways; it will be enough to give a few specimens of it.

We are required (say they) by the Evangelists to "receive the kingdom of God, as little children," that is, with an implicit obedience to it's authority and injunctions, as not being enabled, and therefore certainly not commanded, to exercise any act of reason in the admission of it's truth. But these acute expositors of Scripture probably know, if not they should be told, that the words *little ones* or *little*

the Quietists and other Fanatics of that Communion, by Bishop *Stillington* in "his Discourse of the Idolatry of the Church of *Rome*. ch. 4.

children,

children, as used in the Gospel, have often a regard rather to the quality of the temper, than the age of the Disciples, and relate more to the innocency and ingenuoufness of their disposition, than to their ignorance and the unimproved state of their understanding. Let them compare the passages referred to * below with *Matth.* 18. 3. where the sense seems clearly to be, Except ye be free from worldly views and inclinations, from those ambitious designs of wealth or power, which the *Jews* were too much given to expect in the temporal reign of their Messiah, ye cannot be proper subjects of that new and spiritual kingdom, which I am going to promote and establish.

The example of *St. Thomas* is represented also to inculcate this lesson of instruction, That too great a zeal and forwardness of inquiry are unsuitable to the tractable spirit of Christianity; and to imply a tacit commendation of that pliant and docile temper, which is ready to yield it's assent without a minute and scrupulous examination; "be not faithless, but believing." Yet if we look with attention into the Apostle's conduct, and the circumstances of his history as recorded in the Gospel, they no way tend to lead us into a rash and precipitate belief, but to guard us against

* *Mark* 10. 15. *Luke* 18. 17.

the ill effects of an obstinacy, unwilling to yield to reasonable means of conviction; and to secure us against the danger of a capricious temper, indisposed to believe but in it's own way and on it's own terms. "Except I put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my finger into his side, I will not believe," is rather the perverse dictate of humour, than the sober determination of prudence; a disposition rather to indulge an over-nice curiosity, than to be governed by sufficient and reasonable evidence. We may understand by the general reflection, which concludes this narration, "blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have believed;" that it is the mark of an ingenuous mind, and an instance of commendable conduct, to be convinced by proper testimony or such a manner of proof as the nature of a distant fact may admit, rather than to insist in all cases on that irresistible evidence, which arises from the immediate report of our own senses.

But to attribute any kind of merit to faith, or any degree of blame to the want of it, as seems intimated in this piece of sacred history, is opposed by many as a groundless, and ridiculed by some as an absurd notion. Our assent, say they, is to be governed by the evidence, which offers itself to the understanding;

ing; the degree of one must answer exactly to the force and clearness of the other; when it does not so answer, it may be bigotry, or prejudice, or credulity; but it is not a just and reasonable persuasion.

If faith be solely owing to the extraordinary operation of a divine power, acting irresistibly on the mind, I see not indeed how it can be in any degree meritorious or rewardable; but if it be a mixed act of the understanding and the will, if it take in a due improvement of our intellectual, and a proper exercise of our moral faculties; if it require industry to collect the evidence, and impartiality to see it in it's true light, and probity to let it have it's full effect, why is it not under such circumstances commendable? and why are not negligence, perverseness, or prejudice equally culpable, when they obstruct the free course, or defeat the true result of enquiry?

The light of truth is sometimes conveyed to the understanding neither in it's natural colours, nor in an uniform direction; it is bent in it's course, and changed in it's appearance, by passing through the medium of the will and affections; it is of use then to keep that medium clear and undisturbed, that the rays of truth may be more easily and directly transmitted.

If

If God has revealed certain doctrines to men of great consequence to their happiness, and given them faculties by a right application of which they may understand those doctrines, may he not reasonably expect that they should apply their faculties so as to answer the useful purpose for which they were given? And are they not blameable, when they neglect to do it? "Whoever doubted (* says a writer as eminent for the impartiality of his judgment, as his sagacity in reasoning) but to disbelieve is a fault, when a matter is so proposed to a man, that he might and should, and were it not his own fault, would believe it?

§ 10. In that memorable æra of fanaticism, when it was carried to such extravagance and barbarity, as stain the annals of that age, and throw a discredit on the infancy of the Reformation, there started up in *Germany* a multiplicity of sects, who distinguished themselves by particular names, suitable to some ruling principle, or peculiar tenet of their party. One stil'd themselves Apostolick, from a presumptuous affectation they fell into of conforming in all respects to the manners and practice of the Apostles. Their great aim was to follow with a most scrupulous exactness the injunctions of Scrip-

* *Chillingworth's Rel. of Prot.* p. 7.

ture, according to the literal sense and meaning of the words, without considering the occasion or design of them, the place where they stood, or their consistency with other places. * These poor visionaries accordingly marched forth, two and two, through the several parts of the Empire, without staff or scrip, without shoes on their feet, or money in their purse, as provisions inconsistent with the nature of their mission, and expressly forbidden in the Gospel. They set out with full confidence of lacking nothing, and trusted for the support and necessities of life to the compassion of the strangers, whom they went to instruct. The success of the event did by no means answer their sanguine expectations; and numbers of these wretched Enthusiasts, after they had endured much hardship, and undergone many miseries, after they had resolutely suffered the last extremities of hunger under a firm persuasion they could not want, and fearlessly exposed themselves to the weapons of their enemies under a full confidence they could not be hurt, perished miserably at last by famine and the sword.

We live in a more humane and charitable age, as I trust, you have in some measure experienced; but yet you used, I find, a little

** On les voyoit donc marcher deux a deux par toutes les contrées de l'Allemagne sans bâton, sans chaussure, sans poches, et sans argent. Histoire des Anabaptists, Lib. 4. par le P. Fran. Catrou.*

more forecast in the several peregrinations you have undertaken. Your zeal and eagerness " of going abroad for God, (so you are pleased to call the occasion of your travels) did not so far carry you beyond the bounds of discretion, as to make you overlook all the proper accommodations of your journey. Though loosened from all undue attachment to the things of this world, yet so much worldly prudence you thought proper to preserve, as to pay a due regard to the condition and wants of humanity. You do not reject with spleen and moroseness, as some of your fraternity have done, the good things which you piously acknowledge are daily sent you by God *. Though possessed of so happy a talent at opening the hearts and purses of the people, that you were traduced under the name of " the Spiritual Pickpocket, yet you have not ventured to trust your support to the precarious offerings of voluntary contribution; though you have not chosen to put yourself in a situation to claim any legal dues from your hearers, and though it might be difficult to ascertain any demands of this sort which could be made from the possessions or occupations of your audience; yet you have

* In a letter was a bank-note of ten pounds. This I took as a hint from providence to go on doing good to others, with a full assurance that the Lord would not let me want. *God's Dealings*, &c. p. 61.

lately dispensed your instructions, on the stipulation of certain periodical payments, and under the sanction of that unquestionable truth “ that the labourer is worthy of his hire.”

They thought themselves obliged to make a literal compliance with the direction of their master, “ What ye hear in the ear, that preach upon the house-tops ;” they begun with zeal, * as their history informs us, to carry their new design into execution ; and after a competent practice arrived at wonderful agility at climbing up the tallest edifices ; they attained also, by daily vociferation and a constant exertion of lungs, an amazing faculty of making themselves heard by the passengers from such a lofty and inconvenient eminence.

You, in the first essays of your preaching, used only the slender advantage of a chair, a joint-stool, or a table ; which many of your brother-teachers still continue. You have sometimes indeed, after the example of other itinerant orators, had an occasional stage erected for your use ; but I never heard of your being mounted higher, than the balcony of a house, or the stairs of a wind-mill ; so that it is plain you never meant to follow the absurd pattern of the above-named Preachers

* *Les nouveaux Predicateurs n'avoient point d'autres chaires, que la couverture des maisons. Ils y montoient avec agilité et de là ils faisoient entendre leur voix aux passans. Hist. des Anabap. p. 256.*

in this respect, though you may have gone rather too far in imitating their literal manner of expounding Scripture. The fabricks of antient days were indeed, if we may recur to the aids of human literature on such an occasion, better fitted by the formation of their roof, than modern ones are, for the convenience of a popular harangue; especially if it be found necessary to enforce the instruction, delivered from thence, by any vehemence of gesture, or violent agitation of the body. Whence a reasonable presumption may be drawn, that either the literal interpretation of the passage is wrong, or that the practice was not intended to be perpetual.

These modern Apostles understood also literally the direction of "becoming as little children; and to support this new character the better, are said, though it almost surpasses all belief, to have accustomed themselves to all manner of puerile conversation and amusements. They esteemed it an act of a more pious conformity to the injunctions of the Gospel, the more strictly they practised the simplicity, and let themselves down to the fooleries of childhood*.

I never heard, that you disgraced your understanding by any senseless affectation of this

* *Pour être semblables à des enfants, on les voyoit s'abaisser à des petits Jeux & affecter une simplicité puerile.* Hist. des Anabap. p. 257.

fort;

sort; though you have a wonderful faculty, I have been told, of lowering the sense and language of your instructions to the humblest pitch of popular apprehension. One of your friends has thought it necessary to excuse this, as not owing to any deficiency of parts or learning in yourself, but rather as the effect of judgment, accommodating the matter of your sermons, to the mean capacity of your hearers. " He brings into his discourses (says your Apologist) short and apposite relations, as the bulk of his congregations is different, and consists of a lower class of people; (from that which generally goes to parish-churches, as it is elsewhere explained); * and he finds by experience this works stronger in their minds, than if he were to follow the beaten track of sermon-preaching."

I have sometimes wondered indeed, as I have run over the narrative of your adventures, at the nonage of some young converts whom your discourses seem mightily to have affected. They did not appear to me to have reached those years, or arrived at that period of life, which should make them capable of forming any judgment about the truth or justness of the matters which you delivered. They did not express, 'tis true, their sense of the impressions, made upon them, by any ra-

* *Christian and Critical Remarks on the Minor.* p. 9.

tional account of what they had heard, but * by sighing, or weeping, or falling into fits. But you may suppose, consistently enough with what you advance in other places on this subject, that they may be capable of receiving religious impressions, or of performing religious acts, before they have arrived at any maturity of understanding, or indeed at any proper use or exercise of their reason.

The absolute dominion, which an able speaker can exercise over the minds of men, and his power of impressing what images he pleases upon them, by the magick of words, may be incredible to such, as have seen or felt no effects of this kind. This wonderful operation may probably be sometimes owing to his skill in selecting such topicks, as are most likely to affect, and urging them in a manner which will strike with most force on the apprehension of his hearers. But yet the business is sometimes done without the least practice of these arts, or the exertion of any of these talents.

† Mr. *Pope* has justly bantered the Theatre, when they raised the thunder of applause at seeing the long wig and gown, but without any specimen of those abilities, which so well

* See 1 *Four*. p. 49. 3 *Four*. p. 57.

† *Imitations of Horace*. Ep. 1. L. 334.

filled up the character of *Cato*. And we have instances on record *, how an Audience has been dissolv'd into tears, by an Orator, without knowing a single syllable of that which he uttered; have been moved by the efficacy of words which they did not understand, and by the goodly appearance of the Speaker, whom they knew nothing of, to yield the sincerest proofs of their conviction by a liberal supply of such good things as he wanted. — Some Incidents of the same sort are said to have happened to yourself, and that the bare sight of your blessed gown and wig, though out of the reach of that elocution which so much surprizes, and that pathos which so much moves, has not only softened the hearts and moistened the eyes, but drawn large pecuniary supplies to your charitable designs from the pity and benevolence of your female disciples.

No offence, I presume, will be taken at the free manner, in which your opinions may be here discussed, as you formerly were un-

* *Ipso venerabili Abbate Jeffrido, sermonem suo more ad populum luculentissime personante, viri et mulieres innumeri de vicinis oppidis concurrebant; qui licet Latine vel Gallice loquentem illum minimè intelligerent, tantum intendentes ad illum, virtute verbi Dei et gratia vultus sui ad lachrymas multoties compuncti, — innumeras Eleemosynas erogabant. —*

Appendix incerti Auctoris (Petri Blefensis ut vult Cambdenus) in Ingulphum.

apud Rerum Anglic. Scriptores post Bedam præcipuos.

Lond. 1696. p. 520,

moved

moved at any attacks of this kind*. It is a circumstance in the Romish church sometimes inconvenient for a debate, that you may use freedoms with a man, who may get into the Litanies, and if you would act a consistent part, must make intercession to him as a saint, whom you had taken too much liberty with as a common man. This was the hard case of *Ste: Pasquier*, who when he had just published his censure on the Jesuits, was stun'd with the news of *Ignatius's* canonization.

So much caution may not be necessary in a Protestant country, unless your new scheme of Beatification should be allowed, in which you have exercised a greater power, than was ever practised by the Pontiffs themselves. They have taken into the Calendar, but after a competent number of years from their death, men of exceptionable character, but you it seems can cancel at once all the guilt and infamy of an execution, and inroll a man into the list of Saints, who the week before was condemned and hang'd as a felon†. Is

* "Read a pamphlet wrote against me by a clergyman, I bless God, without any emotion. — I do not feel the least resentment, but a love for him." 3 *Jour.* p. 10, 11.

† The case here attended to, is that of the infamous coachman, *T.* and some of your hearers have not done you justice in their report, if in the funeral oration which you made for him the Sunday after he was executed, you did not pronounce him from your own knowledge, to be "a blessed Saint in Heaven."

this a likely way of improving the morals of the people, to which you pay such attention, or of preserving the good order of government, for which you have such a zeal, that you should thus presume, Sir, to rejudge in effect the most solemn acts of public justice, that the decisions of the tabernacle should thus tend to defeat, as to the exemplary and useful part of punishment, the proceedings of Tyburn, and that you should by your own authority exalt a man to a distinguished place in Heaven, whom the laws of his country had just adjudged to be unworthy of any place upon earth?

It is with regret, that I am here obliged to take leave so abruptly, and before I had gone through the particulars of your doctrines and practice, as I proposed. However I intend shortly to resume the subject, and take the liberty of addressing myself to you in a second Letter.

I am, SIR,

Your's,

ACADEMICUS.

